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Items 8 and 9 of the provisional agenda*
General exchange of views
Political Declaration and International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

Letter dated 1 April 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Malta addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith a paper entitled "Ethical Issues in Old Age" (see annex), and would particularly like to highlight the penultimate paragraph, in which the Government of Malta, inter alia, proposes that the World Assembly submit a request for the establishment of an international task force of experts mandated to prepare a comprehensive report in which they examine the moral questions that face human beings concerning the process of ageing.

I would be very grateful if you were to circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, which is scheduled to be held in Madrid, from 8 to 12 April 2002.

(*Signed*) Walter **Balzan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/CONF.197/1.

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Annex

Ethical issues in old age

Whereas

(a) During the latter part of the twentieth century, life expectancy has increased by about 20 years, and is expected to extend a further 10 years by 2050, giving rise to new issues and problems regarding the quality of life;

(b) This success in increasing longevity is widespread, but the expected improvement in quality of life remains unequal;

(c) All governments have shown concern about the challenges resulting from a longer life, but deeper reflection and action are required conjointly from all partners, public and private, corporate and individual, for an adequate response to this phenomenon.

Whereas

(a) In 1969, on the initiative of the Government of Malta, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution giving priority consideration to the phenomenon of ageing;

(b) Malta played an active and important role during the first World Assembly on Ageing, which took place in Vienna from 26 July to 6 August 1982, and in the formulation of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing;

(c) On 15 April 1988, following the adoption of resolution 1987/41 by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on 14 May 1987, based on the recommendations of the Plan of Action for worldwide research and training in the field of ageing, and the agreement signed on 9 October 1987 between the United Nations and the Government of Malta, the International Institute on Ageing was officially inaugurated in Malta by the then Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar.

Whereas

(a) Various declarations relating to the rights of older persons and the formulation of strategies regarding their quality of life have been produced since the first World Assembly by the United Nations, the European Union and other international entities, in the course of which several ethical issues have arisen, not all of which are susceptible to judicial or categorical treatment, but which call for deep moral reflection and responsible commitment by public authorities, non-governmental organizations and individual human beings;

(b) Among such issues, the following may be highlighted:

(i) Preservation of respect for human dignity when there is declining capacity for autonomous decision-making, usually due to increasing physical, intellectual and psychological disabilities;

(ii) Use of language about older persons, in particular, by the young, by those professionals whose work brings them in contact with older persons, by the media and authors and by older persons themselves;

(iii) Use of talents by older persons without self-imposition on others or acceptance of exploitation by others;

(iv) Distribution of responsibilities between relatives and carers, including the conveying or withholding of information;

(v) Reciprocal duties of older and younger generations within the family;

(vi) Distribution of responsibilities between non-governmental organizations and the State, including consideration of compulsory retirement and appropriate work opportunities;

(vii) Differential punishment for crime by and against older persons and other social issues where differential treatment of older persons needs to be considered;

(viii) Envisaging unmarginalized roles for older persons in a global economy;

(ix) Transmission by older persons of the particular kind of wisdom that only age and experience can provide, according to different cultural modalities and at different stages of social development;

(x) Conditions that allow all human beings, including older persons, to show generosity and to exercise magnanimity beyond the exigencies of strict justice. The possibility of this exercise of solidarity is an expression of the unity of mankind.

The Government of Malta proposes that the Second World Assembly on Ageing request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to establish an international task force of experts mandated to prepare a comprehensive report, in which they would examine the moral questions that face human beings concerning the process of ageing.

The task force is not to be required to provide definite answers to all the questions that arise but to ventilate the different solutions that can be reasonably prospected for consideration by public or private decision makers. The objective of the report will be the enhancement of general awareness of the moral issues involving older persons and of responsibility in settling them.